



February 23, 2022

Public Hearing on:

House Bill 5037 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023

(Department of Children and Families)

Good afternoon/evening, esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am Joyce Lewis, the Executive Vice President of Key Human Services, Inc, a statewide organization providing services and supports to individuals with disabilities across the lifespan. Our agency is based in Wethersfield and I live in South Windsor. Key provides a combination of community based individual and residential supports in 40+ towns and all 8 counties in CT as a provider for DDS, DCF and DSS.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak about the state budget and its impact on the work that we do. I want to thank you for your support to provide a living wage to our staff and to invest in the future of non profits. The crisis continues, so I ask you to continue your commitment to our work with additional funding this year.

It has been another year filled with unexpected challenges arising at every turn ranging from fiscal shortfalls; to pandemic surges; to a catastrophic staff shortage. Let me give you a window into our world ...

Key has operated a Therapeutic Group Home under the auspices of DCf for many years. For many of those years, this group pf staff was the most highly paid as was appropriate due to the educational requirements for employment. Over the years, funding did not increase in DCF. Our DDS staff was mandated to receive a higher rate of pay which we are very grateful for but the disparity is a huge issue.

Staff are required to meet the educational standard in this home for less money than our staff in other homes. What is the message here for staff? This has had a significant impact on staff retention even before our current catastrophic staffing shortage. How does this turnover impact the young ladies that we support? All of these girls have significant histories of trauma, broken relationships and of course mental health challenges. Inconsistency of staff disrupts their sense of security, their consistent

routines, and their trauma informed care and treatment plans. The losses and relationship damage are perpetuated by this constant turnover. Behaviors increase with unfamiliar staff, routines are not maintained despite our best efforts.

Funding needs to dramatically increase to stabilize programs like ours in order for the youth in our care to actualize the futures intended by this intervention model. The model of care is time limited, the impact is lifelong. Underfunding hurts our agency, it hurts our staff but it may very well permanently hinder the futures of the very youth that we are here to empower.

For children's providers, your commitment to increase funding by \$461 million is needed now more than ever as we are seeing an increase in the need for children's mental health services. As a provider serving Connecticut's children and families, I have been encouraged to see the legislature's focus on the children's mental health crisis this year. But I want to be clear: **There is no way to address the gaps in the children's mental health system without addressing the chronic underfunding of the existing services provided by nonprofits.**

Please take action to support the nonprofits that are underfunded, overwhelmed and hanging on by a thread by increasing the funding for current services by the additional 8% for FY23

Thank you for all you do and for your time and consideration today.

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Key Human Services, Inc. is an agency of Keystone Human Services, and a 501(C)(3) Non-Profit Organization registered with the Internal Revenue Services.